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Unusual farewell to E. German spymaster

By Elizabeth Pond
Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

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East Germany takes good care of its spies.

And that made this month's terse six-line farewell to legendary spymaster Markus Wolf all the more extraordinary.

The Communist Party newspaper Neues Deutschland said simply that highly decorated Deputy Security Minister and Lt. Gen. Wolf is leaving "the active service at his own request."

Since Wolf has not yet reached the 65-year general retirement age in any case - and since Security Minister Erich Mielke, whom Wolf was widely tipped to replace, is still in active service as he approaches his 80th birthday - Wolf's departure is totally unexpected.

Equally unexpected is such a public announcement, terse or not, of the comings and goings of Soviet-bloc secret-service heads.

Two rival theories are circulating in the West.

The juicier is that Wolf, who is believed to have retained his Soviet citizenship since his years in exile in Moscow in the Hitler era, may have displayed divided loyalties in a period of some strain between the East German and Soviet leaderships over the Soviet reform course.

The more humdrum - and West-

ern analysts tend to think the more likely - explanation is that Wolf's health may have dictated his retirement.

The dapper "Mischa" Wolf, lauded by the Jerusalem Post as "indisputably the best of all spymasters of the world," built up the efficient East German intelligence network after he returned to Germany at the end of World War II from Moscow along with Walter Ulbricht, the first East

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German leader.

Wolf's greatest known successes were the planting of agent Günter Guillaume in the offices of West German Chancellor Willy Brandt in the early 1970s and the turning of West Germany's counterespionage chief Hans-Joachim Tiedge in the 1980s. His greatest known loss was the defection to West Germany in 1979 of officer "Werner Stiller" - complete with 10,000 photocopies of documents - from Wolf's crack unit for acquiring intelligence about Western high technology.

Mr. Guillaume was originally one of an array of young East German agents placed in West Germany to build careers over a long time and begin sending valuable information to East Berlin only after years of dormancy.

This type of spying - a hallmark of Wolf - is a relatively easy operation for native German speakers operating in an open West German society that absorbs tens of thousands of East German immigrants each year. Similar agents have been uncovered working as secretaries - alongside other secretary-spies who have been seduced and turned by East German agents - in the West German Defense and Economics Ministries, the West German President's office, party bureaus, defense industry, research institutes, and NATO.

Wolf's name first appeared in public in 1973 - an unusual event then, too - when he and his brother, film director Konrad Wolf, signed an announcement in Neues Deutschland of the death of their mother.

Markus Wolf allowed himself to be photographed by newsmen in 1982 at the funeral of his brother and again last year at the 36th anniversary celebration of the secret service.

He was also photographed secretly by Western agents in Stockholm in 1978, and that photo was distributed to the Western press.